

# On the Restored Kingdom of Busoga: A Comparison with the Buganda Kingdom

Nobuhiro NAKABAYASHI  
Kanazawa University

## 1. TRADITIONAL CHIEFS IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY AFRICA

On the pages of the Uganda national newspapers we frequently find news about activities of the traditional or cultural leaders.

'Jopadhola cultural leader Tieng Adhola Moses Owor has appeared to his subjects to launch the Padhola Development Forum' (1/9/2003)

'Jinja: The Minister in charge of the Presidency, Kirunda Kivejinja, has urged Basoga clan leaders to unite with the Kyabazinga to fight poverty in kingdom' (2/9/2003)

'South Africa: The Kabaka of Buganda, His Royal Highness Ronald Muwenda Mutebi II, was the chief guest at the Annual Zulu Kingdom Reed Dance ceremony celebrated here at Enyoken Royal Palace Nangoma' (15/9/2003)

The Jopadhola is a small ethnic group in southeastern Uganda and it has not a kingdom historically. The above mentioned Jopadhola cultural leader is actually a traditional local chief. He becomes a constitutional cultural leader shoulder to shoulder with royals of bigger kingdoms. Kyabazinga is the King of Busoga, to whom a Government minister refers as a center to 'fight poverty' at this occasion. It should be noted that he has actually no administrative power. As he is certainly not a materially providing center he must be a kind of spiritual center to fight against poverty. The King of Buganda went to South Africa to meet the Zulu King. The latter is also of a cultural rather than of a political institution. So the ceremonial occasion was appropriate for the two Kings to meet. Interest thing is that the Kabaka is not a diplomat but he actually acted as a kind of international ambassador of an ethno-nation (Buganda).

What are these cultural leaders actually? Around 1960's when independence and decolonization was the tendency of the time, most African tradition, especially that of kings and chiefs, deemed to be the things of the past. They were generally regarded as obstacles to newly created nation states. After nearly a half century's experience of the postcolonial turmoil, however, Africa seems to rediscover a sort of usefulness of the tradition. It is, after all, the unique African culture. In 1993 the Uganda government of President Museveni allowed to

restore the kingship of some of the traditional rulers as far as it is 'cultural' and therefore non-political. This Ugandan revival of the traditional authority seems to represent an emergence of a latent current in Africa.

However, there is certainly some ambiguity surrounding the cultural leaders as to their roles in the national development and in democracy of the present-day Uganda. Some doubt their ability to develop the country and believe their institutions are waste of money. The question is why they are restored at this moment of general African hardship.

Generally speaking those African kings and chiefs who have survived the age of democracy and nation state as public figures of political scenes belong to the one of the three following types.

The first one is that the traditional king became the constitutional monarch of a nation state after independence. They are rare cases, which are found only in Swaziland and Lesotho. They have their own complicated history and political environment to become the constitutional monarch, but it seems to be apparent these two modern monarchs have been possible because their nation states are small and mono-ethnic. (However, similarly small ethnic states of Rwanda and Burundi have been abolished the kingship since independence).

The second type is more common in that traditional rulers and chiefs take part in national and local politics as politicians and bureaucrats while retaining their informal status as chiefs and making use of their subjects' loyalty for the purpose of their political activity. For instance, in Nigeria after decades of the political attempts of reducing the power of the traditional chiefs the Yoruba politics is still centred around the traditionally titled chiefs who are successfully participated in the party politics as citizens. The different ranks of chiefs organize themselves and their people into political parties upholding the Yoruba ethnic unity and regional interests, even occasionally in conflict with their own traditional king's interests.<sup>1)</sup>

The third type includes what we find in the present-day Uganda. Traditional leaders are constitutional but they are rather cultural than political or administrative. In other words, these traditional leaders can legally enjoy privileges which are entitled to them under culture, custom and tradition, but they cannot join or participate in partisan politics.

Compared with the first two types the third type of the present-day traditional leadership is somehow difficult to grasp its nature of authority because of its hybridity of the modern and the traditional political system. Is it only symbolic? Does it have no informal political influence? What is the relation between the formal political power and the cultural leadership? In fact, there are certain varieties among this type of leadership, and the nature of authority changes accordingly.

In Zambia there is a political institution called the House of Chiefs, which has an advisory work for the President. The House is consisted of 27 traditional chiefs from country's

---

<sup>1)</sup> O. Vaughan, 2000, *Nigerian Chiefs: Traditional Power in Modern Politics 1890s-1990s*, The Univ. of Rochester Press.

9 provinces (that is, 3 chiefs from each province). Botswana has the similar type of the House of Chiefs too, side by side with the National Assembly. The Republic of South Africa has a constitution which contains a separate chapter for traditional leaders. It says that the constitution will recognize the institution, status and role of traditional leadership, according to local customary law. There is the popular election system of traditional chiefs and traditional councillors from 1990's. This seems to be a unique combination of democracy (popular election) and chieftaincy (hereditary position). In Nigeria there are indigenous administrative structures apart from the Local Government system. In a State there is a Traditional Council headed by a 'first class chief', under whom there are 'second class chiefs' whose domain is the Local Government Areas. There are also 'third class chiefs' who take charge of the Districts.

These varieties of the modern systems of the traditional chiefs show a wide range from the national to the local system, from appointed position to elected one, and from advising role to complementally administrative role. However, some common characters are noticed. Their position is clearly defined by the national law and only recognized chiefs have formal roles. Consequently, there always remain unrecognized and redundant traditional chiefs. The recognized political role is also fairly restricted by law, and always restricted to non-partisan activities. If those recognized chiefs have political or administrative roles they are only secondary to the principal political and administrative systems of a nation. Considering these characteristics of the third type chiefs in other parts of Africa, Ugandan recognized cultural chiefs seem to be less political and more cultural. I like to explain this point by the example of works of the Busoga chiefs in the next chapter.

## 2. CHIEF'S WORKS IN THE BUSOGA KINGDOM

As I will explain fully in the later chapters, the Busoga Kingdom is actually a union of chiefdoms. The position of the Kyabazinga, the King, was a creation of the British colonial government. On the other hand, each of the 11 chiefdoms which consist of the present-day Busoga Kingdom has real precolonial history. A chiefdom is now called Saza and the head of a chiefdom is commonly called Saza chief, though every Saza chief has his peculiar name of the title. The Kyabazinga is in fact the one of these Saza chiefs after the certain way of selection. Here I try to describe what the present-day Busoga chiefdoms actually work for instead of explaining the works of the Busoga Kingdom as a whole. This is because I think that the chiefdom or the Saza is the real working unit of the Kingdom.

As a recognized political and governmental institution the African chiefship at present is conveniently seen to be different from other state institutions in its newly formed hybridity of

tradition and modernity. Chiefs are certainly situated in the middle between the state and the citizens both of which are constituents of a modern nation state, while at the same time they are regarded as the upholders of traditional customs. But exactly what is new in the today's African chiefship? Rijik van Dijik and Rouveroy van Nieuwaal explain the chief's work as follows.

... we can interpret chiefs as 'converters' in African societies today, because they convert the power of the 'past' to that of the present, the power of the secretive into public power, the law of 'tradition' into codified customary law, and the power of ritual into manifest political power.<sup>2)</sup>

They also say the term 'mediation' as a usual word for describing the chief's work is a problem because it presupposes power only from above and chief's work of passing it down. And they say the term 'mutational work' is more horizontal in its connotation, referring to the often highly respected activities of certain actors who are capable of transforming one form of power from one domain to a different form of power in another domain. This is particularly true to the cultural leaders in Uganda because they have little political power which would use for the negotiation between the higher governmental authority and the common people's opinion. After observing the works of the Busoga cultural leaders I think it better to use the term 'mediation' only for the vertical meaning, that is mediation between the government and people. Then I select another three terms for their more 'horizontal' works; group networking, fund arrangement and reinvention of tradition. The following sections are explanations of these chief's works actually seen in the present-day Busoga.

#### (1) Mediation

The present Ugandan local government of a district has two ways of directly integrating local population. The one is the administrative hierarchy of District-County-Subcounty-Muluka officials (administrative chiefs). The other is the 'political' organization called 'Local Council' (LC) which has a hierarchical system of LC5 (district level), LC4 (county level), LC3 (subcounty level) and down to LC1 (sub-village level). The administrative chiefs are appointed and employed by the local government and their works are administrative routines. The Local Councillors are elected by local voters according to their constituencies. The LC system is the pivotal institution of the 'no-party' politics of present Uganda supposed to represent broad populace. From the constitutional point of view these administrative chiefs and Local Councillors are local mediators and representatives of the people.

---

<sup>2)</sup> Rijik van Dijik and Rouveroy van Nieuwaal, 1999, *African Chieftaicy in a New Socio-political Landscape*, African Studies Centre, Leiden, p.5.

The traditional and cultural leaders have formally little mediating or representing role for the local people. In practice, however, they are good publicity agents of certain government policies because of their traditional, ceremonial or cultural character. They are seemingly non-political and therefore are sometimes assigned to publicise certain government policies concerning health, education or development.

They work like this. One day some of the cultural leaders in eastern Uganda including those of Busoga held a meeting to discuss for fighting alcoholism. They had a six-day workshop supported by Action Aid Uganda to make a recommendation. It included selling locally distilled alcohol only to registered companies, banning the sale and drinking of alcohol during working hours for the manpower to be used to the maximum, and lobbying local councils to enact to by-laws to address the problem. Since alcoholism has been considered by the government as one of the problems which hindered the development in rural areas, the cultural leaders took up the issue and made the resolution. Unlike the government these leaders have little actual resources to implement the cause but at least they can campaign side by side with the local government.

It is noted here that alcoholism is one of the habitual problems of people and not a problem of partisan politics. The mediating role of the traditional and cultural leaders is thus properly displayed in the area of non-political issues.

## (2) Fund arrangement

One of the critical problems for the cultural leaders to survive is their weakness of financial base. They have not a power of taxing and they are not much financially supported by the government. They are basically supposed to fare by their wit. There seems to be two main expenditures for their works to go on. One is the expenditure for the public affairs in general and the other is for their own internal enterprise like keeping a chief's office and holding their own traditional ceremony.

Public funds are surely necessary for any important campaign for the local people. They seek into any private funds or NGO funds. In one occasion, according to a local newspaper (New Vision 12/9/03), the official for Health in Busoga Kingdom asked the NGO co-ordinator of a US-based anti-AIDS organization to concentrate their efforts on rural areas rather than urban centres. In this meeting the Kingdom official said NGOs should help to provide anti-retrovirus drugs to patients in rural communities and to set up income-generating projects.

The Kingdom has no resources of fighting against AIDS but has instead a certain degree of influence on the fund-carrying NGO. Diverting the drugs to 'rural areas' may mean to help the vast majority of the Basoga peasants rather than, say, Kampala residents. It is noted that the above occasion was a courtesy call on the Kyabazinga by the NGO co-ordinator. The cultural leader's ceremonial role is just good for the recipient gateway of this kind of fund. Diverting or simply raising funds for the Kingdom's or chief's area is the most expected works

by the people. The Kyabazinga can hold the fund raising occasions from time to time for the youth's education or for the women's self-help groups.

Another kind of fund raising is necessary for the leadership itself. The Saza chiefs are especially in a financially difficult position. While they have an office there is no one to pay the expense of maintaining it. The chief himself has no salary from the chief's work and whatever staff he has works on voluntary basis. This means they all have other occupations to live by. It is, therefore, necessary to gather contributions from the local people at large, especially when the chief hopes to have an installation ceremony, a funeral ceremony or any other types of rituals which are regarded to be traditional or 'cultural' and to be properly displayed accordingly in front of the public. On these occasions the office of the chief needs deliberations in calculating expenses of the ceremonies and in choosing both the possible contributors and their amount of contributions. After series of meetings for these works the office of the Saza sends invitation letters to main local government officers and local councillors, businessmen, members of the Saza office and leaders of many other associations (cooperatives, NGOs, youth and women organizations) calling for contribution and participation to the occasion.

Apparently these fund gatherings are closely related to the social network of the Saza chiefdoms. This is the next role of the traditional chiefs.

### (3) Group networking

It is now evident that the traditional chiefs in Busoga have little basis of their authority and power. Historically they were once abolished. Politically they are deliberately excluded from the Government and Administration as non-partisan and non-political. Financially they are mostly dependent on the money of contribution and other outside funds. Therefore their survival as the 'cultural' institution is primarily based on the direct support from the local people. And contact with local people is what the chiefs can do most.

As traditional and indigenous personality the Saza chiefs have many contacts and connections with the local people, in kinship and clan relations as a prominent member of the royal lineage, in religious affiliations and in personal friendship of local politicians. In addition to these original relations and through them the chiefs try to cultivate contacts with new institutions like schools, self-help associations, women's organizations, clubs of businessmen and shopkeepers and so on. They attend meetings, workshops, funerals, marriage parties, anniversaries and other kinds of ceremonies mostly by the invitations. On these occasions the Saza chiefs sit as main guests greeting participants and addressing to the public.

In Busoga these public occasions are just common and not especially for the Saza chiefs. The guest's seats are usually full of politicians, religious leaders, ranks of administrative chiefs and elderly dignitaries, and their wives. It seems to me, however, that the traditional leaders like the Saza chiefs are special in that because of their 'non-political' and 'cultural' nature they are regarded to be somehow neutral. A Saza chief can visit without hindrance some religious

groups of the Protestants, the Catholics and the Muslims, and even is invited by the traditional religious group (called the Abaswezi). He is sometime a distinguished mourner of a funeral of a common peasant. He is in another time a guest of the most luxurious marriage ceremony in Jinja town. As a result he is making a network between various kinds of groups around him. But what kind of network is it?

When the chief makes speech in front of the public it is usually about his chiefdom's tradition, which is largely forgotten by the people in the course of modernization, political independence and decolonization. He would also touch the issue of traditional culture or customs (obwangwa), which, he insists, will be necessary if the Basoga hope to recover from the degenerated state of morals as a result of the recent political misrule and confusion in Uganda. It seems that the network which the chief tends to bring about is based on a kind of solidarity with a renewed ethnic consciousness. It is in this sense unique since the other networks in present Busoga such as school and educational networks, political networks, religious networks, business and industrial networks are non-traditional and mostly based on Western culture. Therefore, the chiefs tend to represent a side of the renewed ethnic consciousness in the emerging civil society of Busoga.

The chief's network is especially based on the clan system. Unlike the Baganda clans, the number of the Basoga clans have not yet been counted because of their complexity (it is considered to be more than 300). Still the Saza chiefs are trying to represent them in their chiefdom organization (Saza Lukiiko). For this goal the Saza office has to approach all clans within its territory and to organize them into a kind of clan association. I see this work is still on the way but it is apparent that only the Kingdom or the Saza office can do this kind of work of organizing indigenous groups. The clan and the consciousness around the clan are still very alive in Busoga, and this is the reason why I see the networking by the chiefs has a special quality of ethnicity.

#### (4) Reinvention of tradition

As I explained in the last section, the Saza chiefs and their office organize local people on the basis of the Busoga tradition and culture. While they do this work they not only evoke the old traditions but also reinvent seemingly old cultural things. In fact these two processes are one and the same, and it is commonly known as the 'invention of tradition'. It is widely found in colonial and postcolonial Africa. In this sense the Kingdom people are great inventors. The Kingdom itself was an invention after combining all the chiefdoms in the Busoga area into one political body and the Kyabazingaship was created in 1939. So any of the Kingdom organizations, its rules and constitution, palaces, costumes and symbols, festivals and rituals are all inventions, though there are some original cores of them, especially those of the chiefdoms.

At present the Kingdom people's most concern is history. There are two sides of it. Firstly

the history of the royal origin is their foremost legitimacy. There are 11 chiefdoms (Saza chiefs) in the Busoga Kingdom. Five of them have originated from the same royal clan, the Abaise Ngobi. The other six have originated from different clans of their own. In either case their status of the hereditary chiefs entirely depends on the history of their clans. In this case the 'history' means nothing but the oral tradition of their clans. There are no written documents before the colonial era. There is no other legal claim about the royal status except the vague phrase in the Uganda Constitution, which seems to recognize any 'cultural or traditional leader' in any place in Uganda as long as there is a consensus among the local people. Now it is indispensable for the Saza chiefs to have their own written history of the royal lineage, and, in fact, most of the Saza chiefs seem to have at least manuscripts of their lineage traditions.

Secondly, the history of the chiefs' origins left many 'heritage sites'. Most of them are rocks and hills all over Busoga where their ancestors were said to be installed as rulers. Apart from the royalist value, these sites are considered to have a cultural value with which tourist courses can be constructed. Compared with Buganda where many royal heritage sites are already organized into tourist courses, Busoga is underdeveloped in this regard. Many historical rock sites are not well attended. Even some of them are being destructed for chipped construction stones for sale by nearby people. Protecting the sites and making them into the tourist courses are, therefore, a logical answer for the chiefdom people.

As a conclusion of this chapter I can say that the Saza chief in Busoga is a good example of the cultural leader which is defined by the present Uganda Constitution. It was in 1995 that the status of these 'cultural and traditional leaders' was secured in the Constitution. The chapter 16 is about 'Institution of Traditional or Cultural Leaders'. According to it the traditional or cultural leader means a king or a similar leader by whatever name, 'who derives allegiance from the fact of birth or descent in accordance with the customs, traditions, usage or consent of the people led by that traditional or cultural leaders'. It states also that these traditional leaders can enjoy privileges which are entitled to them under culture, custom and tradition, but they can neither participate in partisan politics nor exercise any administrative, legislative or executive powers of Government. These restrictions are rather rigid compared with the other African examples of the traditional chief system mentioned in my previous chapter. The Uganda Constitution only allows cultural roles to the traditional chiefs excluding the traditional political roles based on the customary law. At the present the Saza chiefs (and also the Kyabazinga) are doing just these 'cultural' jobs dutifully.

### 3. A COMPARISON OF THE KINGDOMS: BUSOGA AND BUGANDA

In this and the following chapters I like to compare the two neighbouring 'cultural kingdoms', Busoga and Buganda. For this I have several things in mind. Firstly (chapter 3),



they are founded on essentially similar cultures, especially when one compare them with the 'western' kingdoms (Bunyoro, Toro, Ankole) whose Bachwezi religion and a caste-like division between cattle keepers and peasants were so much conspicuous. Not only culture but their languages (Lusoga and Luganda) are small variations to each other.

Secondly (chapter 4), dissimilarities between Busoga and Buganda Kingdoms are also very meaningful. Buganda had been a unitary kingdom for several hundred years before the colonial powers appeared in this area of the East Africa. It negotiated with the colonial government and, in this process, it became ever more powerful dominating Uganda together with the British power. On the other hand, Busoga had been an area of about 60 independent chiefdoms with no dominating king though there was a difference of bigger chiefdoms and smaller ones. Actually the western part of Busoga was dominated by the Buganda Kingdom and the chiefdoms in that part of Busoga were tributing to it. The Kyabazingaship was derived from the hope on the side of the Basoga who wanted to join the company of the Uganda Kingdoms when the British came to colonize Uganda, as well as from the British hope of governing Busoga with a sole agent of the native ruler in the style of 'indirect rule'.

This fundamental difference of the origins of the two kingdoms has a deep implication in the present day Ugandan political scene. This is my third point to argue (chapter 5). Because of its long and proud history people of Buganda have a strong inclination to the political independence of their Kingdom. This becomes one of the most hot-debated points relating to the 'federo' (federalism) problem in Uganda at the moment. The royalists or the Buganda nationalists are not content with the mere 'cultural' kingdom of the present state and are claiming more real political and administrative power. In short, they want such a federal status for the Buganda Kingdom as can collect tax for its own. This claim is really beyond the scope of the 'cultural' kingdom, and is sometimes accused of attempting to make a state within state. The Busoga Kingdom is, on the other hand, less assertive because of its short and feeble history. Ironically this I think makes the Busoga Kingdom fit better for the present constitutional institution.

Now I start the comparison from the point of resemblance. I will examine briefly three of them, in mythological, sociological and political aspects.

#### (1) The mythological connection between Busoga and Buganda

The key is an ancestor in the person of 'Kintu'. For the Baganda Kintu is the most celebrated mythological figure. He is said to be the first Kabaka, coming down from heaven to Buganda. There is, however, another version which says that Kintu came from the 'east'. The east of Buganda means Busoga, and in Busoga the oral traditions assert that Kintu came from the further east (that is, from Mt. Elgon) and went through Busoga to Buganda. There is even a peculiar version which says that after staying sometime in Buganda Kintu came back to Busoga

at the place called Buswikira, where he eventually died. In fact Kintu's shrine is still kept clean there. Though the Kintu legend is somehow confusing because of so many different versions, and though in Busoga there is another important origin legend in the person of Mukama from Bunyoro, it can be said that at least some sections of the Basoga believed that they and the Baganda are related through Kintu, the Original Man.

## (2) The common clan features

The Basoga and the Baganda are neighbours occupying the opposite sides of the River Nile and, therefore, it is not surprising that their cultures and societies are similar. Their languages are similar too with only a difference of dialects. Their societies are composed of a number of patrilineal clans with tabooed totems. In Buganda each clan is hierarchically organized with the clan head called Owakasolya. Under him there are the subclan heads called Ab'amasiga, the lineage heads called Ab'emituba, and there are even smaller heads of lineages called Olunyiriri and Olugya.

In the present Busoga each clan is hierarchically organized with the clan head called Mukungania. He is the clan head of all the clan members living in Busoga area. He is also the chairman of the clan council with the assistance of Katikiro ('Prime minister') and the Secretary etc. There are also the clan chiefs in each 'Saza' area. He is called Saza chief of a clan. The Saza is an old name for the administrative area of the 'county'. There are now 11 Sazas (that is, Chiefdoms) in Busoga. Under the clan Saza chief there are clan Gombolola chiefs and, under them, clan Muluka chiefs. These clan chiefs' names are all borrowed from the administrative system which existed before the present Uganda government.

It is apparent that the principles of organizing the clan hierarchy in Buganda and Busoga are a little different. While the Baganda clans have the indigenous hierarchical ranks based on the segmentary lineage system, the Basoga's clan chiefship is territorially based on the old administrative areas. The Basoga's system is an innovation after the colonial era, but the remarkable thing is that almost all clans have come to possess this same standardized chiefship system of their own now.

The clan in both Buganda and Busoga profoundly controls many aspects of the people's life in a similar way. It controls the life stages like birth (patrilineal descent), marriage (clan exogamy), funeral (especially, the heir ritual), and the life after death (the idea of 'muzimu', or the spirit of the dead).

## (3) The ranked differentiation in the traditional political system

The Baganda and the Basoga had a similar ranked system of political status before the

advent of the Europeans. Under the Kabaka the Baganda had an elaborate chieftainship starting from the Saza Chief, then downward to the Gombolola Chief, to the Muluka Chief, and to the Mutongole Chief. This hierarchical chieftainship was maintained as the administrative system of the indirect rule in colonial era and was also adopted as the Uganda local government system just after the independence. Then, after decades of being abolished, the chiefship system was restored in 1997, not as a government system this time, but as a part of 'cultural leadership' under the Kabaka. There are 20 'cultural' Saza chiefs in the present Buganda.

In Busoga too there was a differentiation of the political status. Instead of the unitary kingdom there were many independent chiefdoms before the colonial era. Its head, that is, a ruler or small king was called differently according to the tradition of each chiefdom, like Gabula, Zibondo, Ngobi etc. Under this ruler there were a number of 'Mutala' chiefs, who were given the land (mutala) to govern. Under a Mutala chief there were several delegated agents called 'Kisoko' chiefs. These two ranks of lesser chiefs had been remained functional only informally under the newly introduced colonial and postcolonial local government, and were almost extinct under the recent Local Council system. However, after the restoration of the Kyabazinga and the 11 traditional ruling chiefs (called Saza chiefs after Buganda system) some of the Mutala chiefs (and some Kisoko chiefs too) regained their hope to be recognized as 'cultural leaders'.

The point I like to make is that the political culture of hierarchy similar to that of the Baganda is a base of the support of the Kyabazinga by the Basoga. In both societies there has not been a caste-like differentiation like that of 'Bahima' and 'Bairu' in Ankole, where the king has not yet been restored mainly because of the antagonism between them. As Lloyd Fallers once pointed out, there were some common elements of modern bureaucratic culture in the Basoga traditional chiefship, like the flexible clientship based on loyalty and merit.<sup>3)</sup>

It is a well known fact that since the end of the 19th century the Basoga have admired the Baganda as an advanced people of the great power, and they wanted to follow the Baganda's path as well. One of the sources of its powerfulness, they thought, was the presence of the Buganda King. This was, at least, one of the reasons why the Kyabazinga was accepted by the Basoga in the beginning.

The above mentioned origin myths, societal similarities and political histories of the rulers are the shared backgrounds of the Basoga with the Baganda and apparently they support the present Busoga Kingdom at its base.

---

<sup>3)</sup> Lloyd Fallers, 1965, *Bantu Bureaucracy*, The Univ. of Chicago Press, p.241-2.

#### 4. A COMPARISON (CONTINUED): DIFFERENCES

##### (1) The History of the Kingdoms

The origins of the two Kingdoms are very much different. While the mythologies of Mukama and Kintu are related to the ruling class of Busoga and Buganda, and while Kintu is supposed to be the first king of Buganda, Mukama and Kintu have nothing to do with the creation of the Busoga Kingdom. The Busoga Kingdom was a colonial creation. When the British came to colonize Busoga, the most contributed person who conquered Busoga was a Muganda general called Kakungulu. In the mean time these independent chiefdoms were made to combine themselves in order to have a unitary Busoga government. Then Kakungulu was made the first ruler of the whole Busoga in 1906, but his title was not 'King' but 'President' of Busoga.

This means that at first the Basoga were ruled not even by a Musoga but by a 'foreigner'. Thereafter certain features of the Buganda kingdom system, like ranks of chiefship (i.e. Saza, Gombolola, Muluka), were introduced to the Busoga administrative system. In 1939 the title 'Isebantu Kyabazinga', which replaced 'President', was created and the one of the Basoga Saza chiefs, Ezekieri Wako, was installed into this position. This title means 'the Father of people, He who unites them' and thus it implies he is not simply an administrative head like the President but a kind of king of their own people like the Sabasajja Kabaka of Buganda.

The kingdom of Buganda has been certainly existed for many centuries, but the age of its origin is difficult to determine because of the lack of the written documents. The first Kabaka, Kintu, was very much legendary but early Kabakas' era is calculated by historians who studied its oral history. According to a known dynastic chronology one of the earliest Kabaka, Kimera, is 19 generations ago from Mutesa I who died in 1884. From this data S. Kiwanuka calculated Kimera's reign was in the middle of the 14th century, while R. Oliver calculated it in the middle of 15th century.<sup>4)</sup> In any case it is an impressive royal history as a kingdom of this area, and especially contrast to the Busoga Kingdom is obvious.

##### (2) Territoriality and the defined components of the Kingdoms

Both present Buganda and Busoga have a clearly defined territory which was largely a colonial creation. Now it is interesting to note that the territoriality and the definition of the kingdom components of the two cultural Kingdoms is somehow different.

---

<sup>4)</sup> S. Kiwanuka, 1971, *A History of Buganda: from the Foundation of the Kingdom to 1900*, Longman. pp. 284-5.

The component of the Buganda Kingdom is usually defined as the Kabaka and the 52 clans. It appears to me that the Baganda tend to avoid to make clear the territoriality of the Kingdom. I can reckon some of its reasons. It is well-known that a part of Buganda adjacent to Bunyoro was taken in from the latter at the start of the colonial Uganda. The people of Bunyoro are still crying for the return of the 'lost counties'. It is certainly sensitive to declare now the territory of the Buganda Kingdom apparently including this conflicting part of Buganda.

Furthermore, the present Kingdom is not a political kingdom but a 'cultural kingdom'. In this case the 'culture' mostly means the Baganda ethnic culture. The Baganda has a history of representing the Kingdom by 30 or so clans for hundreds of years. It is therefore quite natural to define the Buganda Kingdom by the Baganda clans, now the number of which is determined to be 52. And, there is another problem of the mixture of the other immigrated ethnic groups in Buganda, especially conspicuous around Kampala, the capital. If the 'subjects' of the Kingdom are defined territorially, the inhabitants of these groups should be included into them. This would be an uncomfortable situation both for the Baganda and the immigrated ethnic groups.

According to the newly promulgated Constitution (Busoga Kingdom, 2000) the area of the Kyabazinga is defined territorially, in a strong sense. Its article 1 essentially says that the chiefdoms holding the Kyabazingaship consist of 11 traditional chiefdoms headed by 11 hereditary chiefs. In other words the Busoga Kingdom is defined as the combined 11 chiefdom territories.

On the other hand there is no mentioning of the Basoga clans in relation to the Kingdom. The reason of it may be that, unlike Buganda, there are too many clans (more than 300) to define which the Basoga clans are. No one has ever ascertained all the Basoga clan names, though many people have been trying to count them. As the Basoga is not defined by their own clanship, the consequence seems to be that any person who has lived long enough in one of the 11 chiefdoms can become a natural member of the Busoga Kingdom irrespective of his/her ancestry. While the Kingdom of Buganda appears to be purely ethnic, that is, of the ethnic Baganda, the Kingdom of Busoga does not appear to be so much ethnic.

### (3) The Royal clan

In Busoga the presence of a large royal clan called Baisengobi is a big difference from the Buganda royals. In Busoga there are tens of thousand of royal family members, usually called as 'princes' (balangira) and 'princesses' (bambedha). It is quite natural that most of these 'royals' have nothing to do with social and economic privileges, especially after years of the Ugandan history of the abolished kingdoms. Only a limited number of families have interest in hereditary offices of traditional chiefs. None the less, the presence of a large number of royals,

though nominal, have a certain effect on the popular image of the Busoga Kingdom: it is 'their' Kingdom for the non-royal commoners.

In Buganda this aspect of the Kingdom is somewhat different. There are very few royals, who are only direct patrilineal descendants of every Kabaka, that is, who are members of a very small royal lineage. Virtually there is no royal clan in Buganda, and all the chiefs, from the Saza to Mutongole, of the Kingdom belong to the non-royal, commoner clans. The image of the Kingdom is, therefore, 'ours' rather than 'theirs'. The Kabakaship is populist monarchism.

However, the difference of these images should not be exaggerated. In Buganda there still is a dominant class of the traditional ex-chiefs in place of the royals. A commoner ('bakopi') feeling of 'their Kingdom' exists in Buganda too.

#### (4) Succession of kingship

In Buganda the heir to the throne is chosen among the sons of the preceding king (secondarily, perhaps, among brothers or brothers' sons of the preceding king). This is a traditional and well-established rule. In Busoga the succession to the Kyabazingaship has been a problem by the obvious reason of the very nature of the united chiefdoms. One of the traditional hereditary chiefs of the component chiefdoms should be selected as a head of the Kingdom (that is, the Kyabazinga). But how? The new Constitution states clearly about the eligibility to the office of the Kyabazinga of the Busoga under the article 5 as follows.

'He is a hereditary traditional ruler of a Chiefdom in Busoga belonging to the Baise Ngobi Royal Clan or a son or a grandson of the same'.

This virtually means that the heir is chosen from one of the Saza chiefs of 5 chiefdoms (Bugabula, Bulamogi, Kigulu, Luuka, Bukono) which are ruled by the Baisengobi royal family, but not from the other 6 chiefdoms (Bunya, Bugweri, Butende, Bunhole, Busiki, Bukooli) whose hereditary chiefs belong traditionally to the other clans than the Baisengobi. In order to elect the Kyabazinga there is 'The Busoga Hereditary Chiefs Royal Council' which is composed of 11 rulers of the traditional chiefdoms, together with the Issabalangira (head of the Balangira).

This Chiefs Royal Council is apparently the pivotal organ of the United Chiefdoms of Busoga. Under the article 4 of the Constitution its function is stated. 'The Chiefs Royal Council shall be the Custodian and preserver of the cultures, traditions and the practices governing or relating to the traditional/cultural rulers of Busoga and the cultures/traditions of the people of Busoga as a whole under the Isebantu Kyabazinga of Busoga'

In Buganda the tradition-conscious clans are very active to preserve customs and cultures of their own. In Busoga the Chiefs Royal Council takes the lead in this task because, unlike in Buganda, the clans are not well organized. The Chiefs Royal Council is therefore a

central organization of the Kingdom with peculiar characters and functions, which are not found in the Buganda Kingdom. It has the double functions of the electing the Kyabazinga among themselves and of the self-assigned responsibility for preserving the Busoga traditional cultures.

## 5. THE KINGDOMS AND THEIR CRITICS

In these difficult days of Africa there are naturally conflicting political opinions. Some of them are in favour of the traditional leaders and some of them are not. Anti-monarchist political views and sentiments have been very common in post-colonial Africa. It is usually held that under the indirect rule the traditional rulers were the agents of the colonial oppressors. The African political future was assumed to be either republican or socialist. Among those critics Mahmood Mamdani has a special word for the government of the traditional rulers; decentralized despotism. By this he means that the colonial rule was always highly decentralized. The autonomous unit of colonial administration was district, which was under the watchful eye of a white District Commissioner. The district was supposed to be administered by customary law, which was in reality manipulated arbitrarily by a hierarchy of kings and chiefs. Moreover, the position of the chief combined executive, legislative and judicial authority. With these features he says 'colonial rule was really a form of decentralized despotism, a fact which it masked as a concession to custom and tradition'.

When the government of the National Resistance Movement restored the kingship as a decentralization process there was certainly scepticism from many sides. The NRM's no-party system needed a compromise. Mamdani says 'while the restoration was cultural, the calculation was political...the NRM resurrected a monarchical tradition and promised to defend its beneficiaries from the divisive activities of political parties provided they promised to remain non-political'.<sup>5)</sup>

Those who doubt the traditional leadership are also sceptical about the compatibility of democracy and kingship. Here I like to examine their criticisms, and while doing so I will take the differences between the Busoga Kingdom and the Buganda Kingdom into consideration. The following critical points made by sceptics and antagonists mostly aim at the 'arrogant' traditional leaders of Buganda.<sup>6)</sup>

---

<sup>5)</sup> M. Mamdani, 1995, *Critical Reflections on the NRM*, Monitor Publications, p.123 and p.126.

<sup>6)</sup> I mostly follow the criticisms made by Rebecca Mukyala-Makiika, 'Traditional Leaders and Decentralization' in Apolo Nsibambi ed., 1998, *Decentralization and Civil Society in Uganda*, Fountain Publishers, pp.96-109.

(1) In relation to the ethnic components of the Kingdom

Criticism: There is firstly an organizational problem about the traditional leaders. How is it possible to integrate all the people within a kingdom boundary as a homogeneous cultural entity while the present-day immigration (especially to big cities) beyond the ethnic boundary is rampant? It is in fact impossible for a large group of immigrants to think itself as the subjects of a cultural king whose ethnic origin is completely different. What kind of protection will be provided to these 'foreign' minorities in case their exclusion becomes a serious social problem in local communities?

This problem is particularly crucial to the Buganda Kingdom because it says it belongs to the ethnic Baganda, that is, to their 52 clans. The members of the other ethnic groups who are living in Buganda are not the 'subjects' of the Kabaka. Many non-Baganda residents in Buganda would not participate in the Kingdom. This would result in discrepancy between the Baganda and the non-Baganda of the local inhabitants in the Kingdom. When the Baganda claim a place for their own it must be a big problem, as they now claim Kampala, the capital of Uganda, where inhabitants naturally come from all over Uganda.

The Busoga Kingdom is defined as a union of 11 chiefdoms, and, by implication, those who live in a chiefdom belong to the Kingdom irrespective of their clan origin. Logically however, in Busoga too there would be the same problem of ethnic belongingness, and actually some sections in Busoga (like the Samia living in Bugiri) disagree to be included under the cultural Kingdom. However, Busoga is a region in which no place has the ethnic mingling of the level of Kampala. Largely, the Busoga Kingdom seems to have less ethnic problem than the Buganda Kingdom, and the problem in Busoga is conveniently buried under the surface.

(2) In relation to the financial ground of the Kingdom

Criticism: The second organizational problem is the economic autonomy of cultural and indigenous institutions. There will be financial difficulties because they can't tax people independently. The governmental financial assistance would never be enough. Self help is the rule for them, therefore they should depend on the financial contribution from the subjects and on their own property if they have any.

This is certainly the biggest problem for the Busoga Kingdom, which has virtually no asset to use for its own development projects. As I explained in chapter 2 as 'fund arrangement', the most useful asset of the King and the Chiefs is their ability to attract donation and fund from people, corporations or governments. By comparison the Buganda Kingdom is rather wealthy. It has an FM station, a newspaper and a travel agency which are incorporated into a trust company (the Buganda Investments and Commercial Undertakings



Limited). The Kingdom has sources of rental income like buildings, land and market places owned by the King. The Buganda Kingdom has another big resource to claim, though this can be a more problem than assets. It is 9000 sq. miles of land which were entrusted to the colonial crown government and then returned to the Buganda Kingdom at the independence in 1962. Now the kingdom is asking to return this 'Milo' land, of which legal ground is however not so obvious. This 'Milo' problem is a potential land mine because of the possible crush between the Kingdom and the occupants of the land. Meanwhile the Busoga Kingdom is free from the Milo problem.

### (3) In relation to the political autonomy of the indigenous body

Criticism: The third organizational problem is the autonomy of political cohesion. Confusions in occasions of succession or election of the heir to the high office are very common in traditional leadership and they are usually difficult to solve. There would be permanent splits among the royals themselves because of contesting a ruler's position.

This must be one of the weakest points of the traditional institutions. There will be always some confusions about who should succeed the king's or chief's position, even though a certain rule of the election of the heir exists. Especially in the case of the Busoga Kingdom there are some ambiguities about who will inherit the Kyabazingaship. Firstly, when one read its Constitution he will find no word of king or kingdom. The formal name for the king's position is expressed as 'Obwa Kyabazinga bwa Busoga', that is, The Kyabazingaship of Busoga. And, instead of the 'Busoga Kingdom', he will find 'The United Chieftdoms of Busoga'. The heir to the Kyabazinga is elected by 'the Busoga Chiefs' Royal Council' which is consisted of 11 hereditary chiefs (Saza) and one head of the Royal Clan (Sabalangira). The Kyabazinga will be chosen among the 5 chiefs out of 11. This is rather a complicated system.

People say that there is no need of a written constitution for the Buganda Kingdom because its tradition is without ambiguities, while the Busoga Kingdom needs the written constitution which tries to define the way of the Kyabazinga's succession and the components of the Kingdom. All in all, the Busoga Kingdom is still an unfinished kingdom, that is, a unique 'united chieftdoms', and it is one of the interesting experiments of the 'cultural leaders' in Uganda.

### (4) In relation to decentralization and federalism

Criticism: When decentralization of the state power is necessary, the traditional leaders may cause a crisis of national unity because they tend to encourage people to focus on their differences only. If they claim their own group rights too much, they would endanger the

process of decentralization itself, which needs also national harmony.

Nowadays Africa is thought to be too much politically centralized after national independence and the decentralization of the power of the central government is supposed to be a step to democratize Africa in general. The decentralization is a complex matter and there are many ways of materializing it. One problem in Uganda is what kind of regional units should be given the decentralized local government power. Buganda is already subdivided into 6 administrative districts and there is no overall political or administrative entity of Buganda itself. The Baganda nationalists naturally want a federal status with an actual local administrative entity of Buganda as a whole. This is what the present government likes to avoid because the cultural kingdom plus the federal administration means a rather independent Buganda, a state within a state.

The situation of Busoga is quite different on this account. The Busoga Kingdom is a union of 11 chiefdoms, and therefore, the people in Busoga don't seem to care much about the subdivision of administration. Recently 3 districts in Busoga were newly subdivided into 5 districts, and still another area (in fact, a chiefdom area) is claiming 'their own' district. Unlike Buganda the separation of the Kingdom system and the administration system seems to be a common sense. In 2004 it was reported that Busoga got a 'federal status' for the first time in present Uganda. This is only possible that this status is only 'cultural' rather than 'political', and this can tell the reason why the Buganda Kingdom is not awarded a federal status so far.

##### (5) In relation to the formally elected political leaders

Criticism: There is a political problem between traditional rulers and formally elected leaders at the local level. The coexistence of these two authorities will benefit the local people when they are properly cooperative, but will create a confusion when they disagree. Traditional leaders and elected leaders may compete as to who should use common resources (land, fund, etc.) for their intended projects. They may also compete in the issue of representation. Whenever there is a controversial issue effecting the local community, a conflict may arise as to who should speak for the people.

This is the most interesting point for the cultural leadership. A Saza is a component of the Busoga kingdom and the Saza chief is the most responsible person of a chiefdom. He should have his own working personnel in order to carry out whatever he intends to achieve in his chiefdom. There is a certain common framework for these personnel. It is usually called a Saza council which is composed of councillors representing different sectors in the Saza, like the representatives of the royal clan and the commoner clans, youth and women voluntary activists, religious leaders (Catholic, Protestant, Traditional), and advisers (businessmen, doctors, educators, farmers etc.). A Saza council has a chairman (the Saza chief), a Katukiro

(Prime minister), a secretary, a treasurer and the like. The councillors may be assigned to specialized ministerial works like publicity and information, cultural activities, health and sanitation, and so on. These personnel are recruited largely by voluntary base. This framework of the chiefdom organization is not standardized in all Busoga and therefore it depends on each Saza chief's plan of what to do with his chiefdom. The extent of how much it is organized also depends both on the Saza chief's effort and on the participation of the side of inhabitants. If there is little interest for the side of the common people the chiefdom won't work, because the chiefdom organization is not supported financially by the Uganda Government and the participation is generally voluntary.

Even if there are two types of locally competed leadership, they are based on different organizing principles. The one is formally electing or appointing, the other is voluntary. As far as the Saza organization is voluntary and financially independent, the two leadership would work complementarily according to the separate rolls (either political or cultural). However, as the critics might worry, there will be a political confusion if those local traditional leaders interfere openly or even covertly in the elections of the members of the Local Councils or the Parliamentarians.

#### (6) In relation to the democratic civil society

Criticism: Whereas civil society is a realm of civility, bargaining, rationality, compromise, accommodation, negotiation and tolerance, traditional movements frequently call for intolerance, sacrifice, feelings of exaltations which may eventually lead to social polarization and threaten to demolish the public sphere. Also there is a gender bias about the traditional leaders. Kings and chiefs in Africa are all men due to the patriarchal nature of the society. Is it possible to redress the general male centeredness of the traditional institutions without applying the principle of civil society?

The civil society the criticism mentioned above is contrasted with the traditional or even feudal nature of kingdoms. I have explained an emerging nature of the Busoga cultural Kingdom in the kingdom level and the chiefdom level. Most of things of these two levels are not purely traditional but what is called neo-traditional. Compared with other four kingdoms in Uganda this neo-traditional character is most conspicuous in the Busoga Kingdom. One of those neo-traditional characters is the nearness of the 11 chiefs to their area people. As I explained above each chiefdom has its own council (Lukiiko) and its own governing staff (Katukiro, Secretary, Treasurer, Councillors, etc.), who work voluntarily and without payment. This sub-system in Busoga is what the Buganda Kingdom has not because of its unitariness. Each chiefdom organization in Busoga could operate as a kind of local NGO. Actually many chiefdom organizations are trying to work within their capacity for preserving the cultural traditions and historical heritages, promoting women's self-help projects, encouraging

children's schooling, advocating environmental preservation and so on. Moreover the newly organized clan associations which have their own chiefship are bodies to support Busoga traditions and the Kingdom. Many of these 'civil' groups are networked by the chiefdom and the Saza chief, as I explained in chapter 2.

Thus in Busoga I think the neo-traditional chiefdom organization and the clan associations is inseparable from 'civil society'. It is true that the traditional leadership has a certain gender bias and it also has a certain 'un-civil' political procedure, but in fact it has also a realm of civility, bargaining, rationality, etc., because if it is successful, the neo-traditional chiefdom has to accommodate the civil society which is also emerging in Busoga.

(7) In relation to the 'anti-monarchist' feeling

Criticism: Traditional leaders are symbols of collective and cultural rights. Collective cultural rights pose a number of problems to democratic citizenship, which is fundamentally based on individual rights. The collective rights may empower certain traditional groups like those which surround the monarch to limit the liberty of the other members of a society in the name of group solidarity and of cultural purity.

It is interesting to note that Busoga is perhaps the least resisting area against monarchy in Uganda. In Ankole, and in Bunyoro in a lesser degree, it is said that there is a considerable antipathy to the ruling class of the past (the Bahima). Common people would fear that the restoration of the king must be a returning of the ruling class. On the other hand, the Kyabazinga is not even formally called 'monarch' or king. Because the Kyabazinga is elected between the chiefs rather than inherited from father to son, his position is nearer to that of 'primus inter pares' among the traditional ruling chiefs than the monarch. These facts would explain that there is remarkable absence of the 'anti-monarchist' feeling among the Basoga.

The weak anti-monarchist feeling among the Basoga also means that there are fewer passionate monarchists in Busoga than, say, in Buganda. My impression is that the Kyabazingaship is vaguely supported by the deep-seated Basoga's wish to become a 'brother' status of the Baganda of the Kabaka. This wish could cancel out a republican sentiment which in any way has been disillusioned by the completely failed partisan politics (so called Obote 1 and Obote 2) and the military rule (Idi Amin).

Lastly I should add one element of democracy concerning chiefship. Many researchers of African modern politics observe that election or popular voting system is encouraging democracy in general. Mikael Karlstrom who recently studied political culture in Buganda writes 'while concept of democracy has been largely assimilated to local conceptions and thereby purged of some of its emancipatory content, there is also evidence that recent experience with democratic practice, particularly democratic elections, is beginning to

challenge and change some of those conceptions'.<sup>7)</sup>

It is true that for democracy the traditional chiefship also needs some kind of election in its territory. Michael Williams studied post-Apartheid local politics in South Africa (KwaZulu-Natal) and found out those chiefs, headmen and traditional councillors, and those who live in their areas, all have found ways to situate newly introduced electoral procedures into pre-existing institutional frameworks. 'More importantly, they have attempted to find ways to utilize these new practices to enhance their own authority'.<sup>8)</sup> This is a little different situation from Uganda, but, because popular voting is a system of accountability, the chiefship in Uganda also need to look to the electoral system in its organization (like the kingdom councillors) even if the leadership remains cultural.

---

<sup>7)</sup> Mikael Karlstrom 1996, 'Imaging Democracy: Political Culture and Democratization in Buganda', *Africa* 66, p.500.

<sup>8)</sup> Michael Williams 2004, 'Leading from Behind: Democratic Consolidation and the Chieftaincy in South Africa', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 42-1, p.134.